



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Proposed Neskowin Marsh Addition to Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge Planning Update 5, July 2000



Greetings!

The Environmental Assessment, Land Protection Plan, and Conceptual Management Plan for the proposed addition of the Neskowin Marsh Unit, to Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge, were available for public review and comment from April 24 through May 24, 2000. The comments were reviewed and a decision has been made. This update provides a brief summary of the comments, describes the decision, and explains what happens next.

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What is the Decision?

The Service has decided to implement Alternative 3, the Preferred Alternative as described in the *Neskowin Marsh Unit Addition to Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge Environmental Assessment and Land Protection Plan*. The decision is documented in the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) which was signed by the Regional Director July 11, 2000.

The selected alternative establishes an approved Refuge boundary for the Neskowin Marsh Unit that includes an estimated 375 acres (see Figure 1 on page 9). The Service can now negotiate with willing sellers to obtain an interest or acquire the lands identified in Alternative 3.



Photo Bonneville Power Administration

Coho salmon smolts use Neskowin Marsh as overwintering habitat before migrating from fresh water to salt water.

What Happens Next?

The decision by the Regional Director concludes the planning process for the addition of the Neskowin Marsh Unit to the Nestucca Bay Refuge. The Service is now authorized to negotiate with willing sellers to purchase an estimated 375 acres in and around Neskowin Marsh in Tillamook County, Oregon.

It is the established policy of the Service to acquire lands or interests in lands only from willing sellers. Purchasing the lands proceeds according to the availability of funds. If you have questions, please contact Roy Lowe, Project Leader, Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex at (541) 867-4550.

What were the Results of the Public Review?

Planning Schedule

EA/LPP/CMP released for
30-day Review.....4/00

Comment Period
Ended.....5/24/00

Notice of Decision.....7/00



A mallard hen and ducklings.
Photo © Ducks Unlimited

The Service received 65 letters, phone calls or e-mail messages during the 30-day public review period for the Neskowin Marsh Unit Environmental Assessment, Land Protection Plan, and Conceptual Management Plan. The comments indicate public support for the Neskowin Marsh Unit addition to the Refuge.

Community groups, conservation organizations, state agencies, and individual citizens support the implementation of Alternative 3, which includes the Neskowin Beach Golf Course within the boundary. Some individuals expressed support for Alternative 2, because it does not include the Neskowin Beach Golf Course. A few individuals supported implementing Alternative 1, the no action alternative. A summary of the comments and Service responses follows.

NESKOWIN BEACH GOLF COURSE

Community Impacts: Some comments expressed opposition to Service acquisition of the Neskowin Beach Golf Course because it would no longer be operated as a golf course. Several comments noted that the Neskowin Beach Golf Course has been a gathering place for many generations and is an important part of the culture and history of Neskowin.

Response: The Service recognizes that the Neskowin Beach Golf Course has played an important part in the history of Neskowin. The Service also acknowledges that social impacts would be felt the greatest by local and visiting golfers who enjoy the short walk to the course, gather at the clubhouse, and enjoy the tradition of golfing on one of the oldest courses on the Oregon Coast.

It is, however, ultimately the golf course owner's decision whether or not to sell the course and to whom the course is sold. The Service could be one of several parties interested in buying the golf course, should the course be offered for sale. If the Neskowin Beach Golf Course owner does not wish to sell, the course would continue to be managed by the owner. The course could also be sold to a party that continues to manage the land as a golf course. If, however, the golf course owner decided to sell the property to the Service and the Service could secure adequate funding to purchase the property, the area would no longer be managed as a golf course.

Wildlife Habitat: Some comments questioned the need to acquire the Neskowin Beach Golf Course because it floods, providing seasonal wildlife habitat for 6 to 9 months each year.

Response: The golf course does provide some marginal migratory bird habitat during periods of flooding, and also short-grass habitat for a limited number of species such as the American wigeon, mallard, and introduced western Canada geese. Acquisition of the golf course by the Service would

What were the Results of the Public Review? (continued)



Smolt-sized coho salmon migrate through Meadow Creek to Neskowin Marsh.

provide an opportunity to restore the area to freshwater wetlands, including all of the valuable natural wetlands functions. Restoration would allow a much greater diversity of fish, wildlife, and plant species to thrive compared to what is currently found. For instance, once native wetland vegetation is established, it would be expected that the area would provide not only the seasonal loafing and foraging habitat that it currently provides, but also breeding habitat for a number of species including mallard, wood duck, Virginia rail, sora, and American bittern.

Other species would also be expected to use the restored wetlands including northern pintail, green-winged teal, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, buffle-head, hooded merganser, great blue heron, green heron, and American coot. Migratory songbirds would also benefit from the restoration. It would also be expected that reptiles and amphibians such as red-legged frogs and northwestern salamanders would thrive.

Preliminary surveys in the southern marsh, just north of the golf course, have revealed substantial use of the area by fry and smolt-sized cutthroat trout and the federally listed coho salmon. The coho salmon and cutthroat trout use the marsh as off-channel overwintering habitat prior to their migration from fresh water to salt water. It is also suspected that steelhead and chinook salmon can be found in Neskowin Marsh as well since they are known to occur in nearby Neskowin Creek. This means that these fish must navigate through the Neskowin Beach Golf Course to reach the marsh.

Meadow Creek, the stream flowing out of Neskowin Marsh and through the middle of the golf course, travels through a ditch that is maintained to keep the golf course drained. Maintenance activities prevent streamside riparian vegetation from establishing and the flow pattern through the golf course causes large ponds to form once the flood waters begin to recede. Streamside vegetation, which is lacking along Meadow Creek, provides natural cover from predators and helps to regulate water temperatures. The ponds forming across the course could result in stranding young salmonids on the fairways or expose them to higher predation rates as the waters recede. Wetlands restoration would help ease migration to overwintering habitat, increase the overall amount of overwintering habitat, provide cover from predators, help regulate stream temperatures, and reduce the risk of stranding salmonids. Overall, wetlands restoration would greatly improve anadromous fish habitat in Meadow Creek.

Management as a Refuge and a Golf Course: Some comments suggested that the Service come to an agreement with the golf course owner to make improvements to wildlife habitat so that the golf course could be managed as both a wildlife refuge and a golf course.

What were the Results of the Public Review? (continued)



Streamside vegetation, which is lacking along Meadow Creek, provides natural cover for fish hiding from predators and helps to regulate water temperatures.

Response: The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. Continuing to manage the property as a golf course for part of the year would not be consistent with the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, because, even with some wildlife habitat enhancement, the golf course would still provide only limited habitat values. The importance of the golf course to the Service is in the potential to restore the area to freshwater marsh in order to increase species diversity and to improve habitat for anadromous fish. Because of the limited habitat benefits and potential management conflicts, the Service would not consider entering into such a partnership.

Neskowin Community Plan: One comment suggested that Service acquisition of the Neskowin Beach Golf Course is not consistent with the Neskowin Community Plan.

Response: Based on the recommendations in the Neskowin Community Plan, the Neskowin Beach Golf Course is designated as significant wetland under the Tillamook County zoning ordinances, although the specific zoning ordinance allows the continuation of its use as a golf course. Acquisition of the Neskowin Beach Golf Course by the Service and restoration of the area to freshwater wetlands is consistent with Tillamook County zoning ordinances relating to designated significant wetlands. In addition, conversations with several individuals involved with developing the Neskowin Community Plan, including personnel at the Tillamook County Community Development Department, indicate that Service acquisition of the golf course and potential restoration of freshwater wetlands are consistent with the Neskowin Community Plan and the Neskowin Community Vision Statement.

Economic Impacts: Some comments expressed concern over the economic impacts to the local community as a result of Service acquisition of the Neskowin Beach Golf Course.

Response: The golf course is operated by the owner, with help from occasional summer employees, so there would be little impact to the local community as a result of lost job opportunities.

Local golfers who typically use the Neskowin Beach Golf Course would be displaced across Highway 101 to the Hawk Creek Course, less than one mile away, or would be required to drive approximately 12 miles south to golf courses in Lincoln City. Because the Neskowin Beach Golf Course is

What were the Results of the Public Review? (continued)



Great blue heron are found at Neskowin Marsh, as are green heron, mallard, wood duck, northern pintail, green-winged teal, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, bufflehead, Virginia rail, sora, American coot, and American bittern.

only open for a limited period during the drier months of the year, and because the opportunity exists to have a similar golfing experience within less than one mile, the economic impacts of not operating the Neskowin Beach Golf Course within the community would be negligible.

Any economic loss would be somewhat offset by increased attraction to the area by the public seeking wildlife-dependent public use opportunities. Although it would be difficult to estimate the dollar amount, this attraction would bring revenue to the local community and Tillamook County through increased tourism dollars.

Historic Value: One comment noted that since the Neskowin Beach Golf Course is one of the oldest course on the Oregon Coast, the historic values should be preserved by continuing to operate it as a golf course under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Response: Acquisition of property would bring any cultural resources under the protection of Federal historic preservation laws, the most important being the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Prior to any land-modifying activities, cultural resources would be considered in the planning process as required by the NHPA. The golf course would be evaluated for eligibility in the National Register of Historic Places. If the course is eligible, mitigation such as photographic documentation of the course would be required and the Service could develop interpretive panels about the history of the course. It is unlikely that the Service would be required to continue operating the golf course as means of preserving its historic value.

REFUGE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Flooding: Some local landowners expressed concern that the localized flooding continues to get worse each year and that Service management of Neskowin Marsh and potential restoration of freshwater wetland on the golf course would increase the water levels during flooding.

Response: The Service has already spoken with several adjacent landowners about the localized flooding caused by beaver dams within Neskowin Marsh. The Refuge has committed to working with local landowners to prevent water damage as a result of beaver dams within the marsh.

Beaver dams, however, are only one aspect of the flooding issue. Over the years, it appears that flooding is an increasing problem for the community.

What were the Results of the Public Review? (continued)



Wildlife viewing and photography would be allowed in a manner that would protect the rare and fragile bog ecosystem.



The flooding problems have become such an issue that the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board recently granted funds to the Nestucca/Neskowin Watershed Council to complete the Neskowin Floodplain Assessment. As landowners within the community, the Service would manage Refuge lands to ensure that Refuge activities would not cause flooding to adjacent landowners. In addition, prior to any freshwater marsh restoration, extensive engineering surveys would be completed and the project would be designed to ensure that adjacent landowners are not impacted.

Management of Public Uses: Adjacent to the west side of the marsh is a small, quiet, but congested neighborhood with poorly maintained one lane streets. Some comments opposed public use development along the west side of the marsh because the streets cannot support increased traffic, and increased congestion may make exit from the community difficult during an emergency such as fire or tsunami.

Response: Neskowin Marsh is small, with the wetlands encompassing about 200 acres. Houses border the marsh on two sides and a foot path that links neighborhoods to the community center and the beach runs along the south end of the marsh.

Wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation would be allowed along the fringe of the marsh in order to minimize the disturbance to wildlife and to minimize impacts to the fragile bog ecosystem found at Neskowin Marsh. The Service would work to focus such activities along the east side of the marsh, off of Highway 101. At this location, parking could be provided adjacent to the highway and a trail system could be developed with an overlook. Concentrating any public uses on the east side of the marsh would minimize the impact to the neighborhoods along the west side of the marsh.

Hawk Creek Road: Some comments identified concerns over the use of the southern portion of Hawk Creek Road. This portion of road is privately owned, however, the Neskowin Community Association provides a limited amount of money for maintaining it because it is the only road out of the community if the Salem Creek Bridge becomes inaccessible. Some citizens are concerned that if the Service were to acquire the road, the southern portion of Hawk Street would be closed.

Response: The Service recognizes the importance of this portion of Hawk Creek Road as an exit during emergency situations and an alternative route for the traffic on the small one-lane roads that are found in the neighborhoods located west of Neskowin Marsh. If acquired, the Service would maintain the road and apply for federal grants to improve the road and possibly relieve the flooding that makes the road impassable during certain times of the year.

What were the Results of the Public Review? (continued)



Reptiles and amphibians such as red-legged frogs and northwestern salamanders thrive at Neskowin Marsh.

Hunting and Fishing: One comment requested that the Service complete an interim compatibility determination for hunting and fishing.

Response: The Service is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee) to identify, prior to acquisition of the new refuges or refuge additions, existing owner-authorized, wildlife-dependent recreational activities that would be allowed to continue on a temporary basis following Service acquisition. The Service is not required to complete interim compatibility determinations for uses that did not previously exist and were not owner-authorized on the proposed Refuge. The interim compatibility determinations for wildlife-dependent public uses temporarily bridges the time period between the acquisition of new Refuge lands and the completion of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan which will thoroughly review public uses with public input. The comprehensive conservation planning process for the Nestucca Bay Refuge is scheduled to begin within the next 5 years.

All parcels within the study area are privately owned. Wildlife observation along the fringe of the marsh is the only wildlife-dependent recreational activity that occurs. An interim compatibility determination was completed and concluded that wildlife observation is compatible for the interim period between Service acquisition and completion of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

It is at the discretion of the Service whether to complete interim compatibility determinations for public use activities that do not occur at the site. Because several community members requested that photography, and environmental education and interpretation be allowed with Service acquisition, the Service completed interim compatibility determinations for these uses. It was determined that photography, and environmental education and interpretation are compatible uses in the interim period.

The Service chose not to complete interim compatibility determinations for hunting and fishing and will defer compatibility determinations for these public uses until a Comprehensive Conservation Plan is completed. In the interim period, hunting and fishing will not be allowed on the Neskowin Marsh Unit.

Impacts from Wildlife: One comment identified a concern that the Refuge would attract such a large number of birds to the Refuge that the birds could become a nuisance to local landowners.

Response: The Service does not anticipate increased bird use as a result of Refuge management in the existing marsh. If the Service should acquire the

What were the Results of the Public Review? (continued)

Neskowin Beach Golf Course, the objective would be to increase habitat values so that the wildlife would use the Refuge, not adjacent neighborhoods. Populations of birds on the restored wetlands would likely be similar to the population numbers on existing wetlands, which are not currently a problem. For these reasons, the Service does not anticipate negative impacts to landowners as a result of increasing bird populations.

Are the Planning Documents Available?

Copies of the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) are available by calling (503) 231-2231 or by writing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuge Planning, 911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon, 97232-4181.

The FONSI, Environmental Assessment, Land Protection Plan, and Conceptual Management Plan, and supporting materials are on file at the same address and are available for inspection on request.

Who Do I Contact?

If you have comments or questions, please write or call us at the following locations:

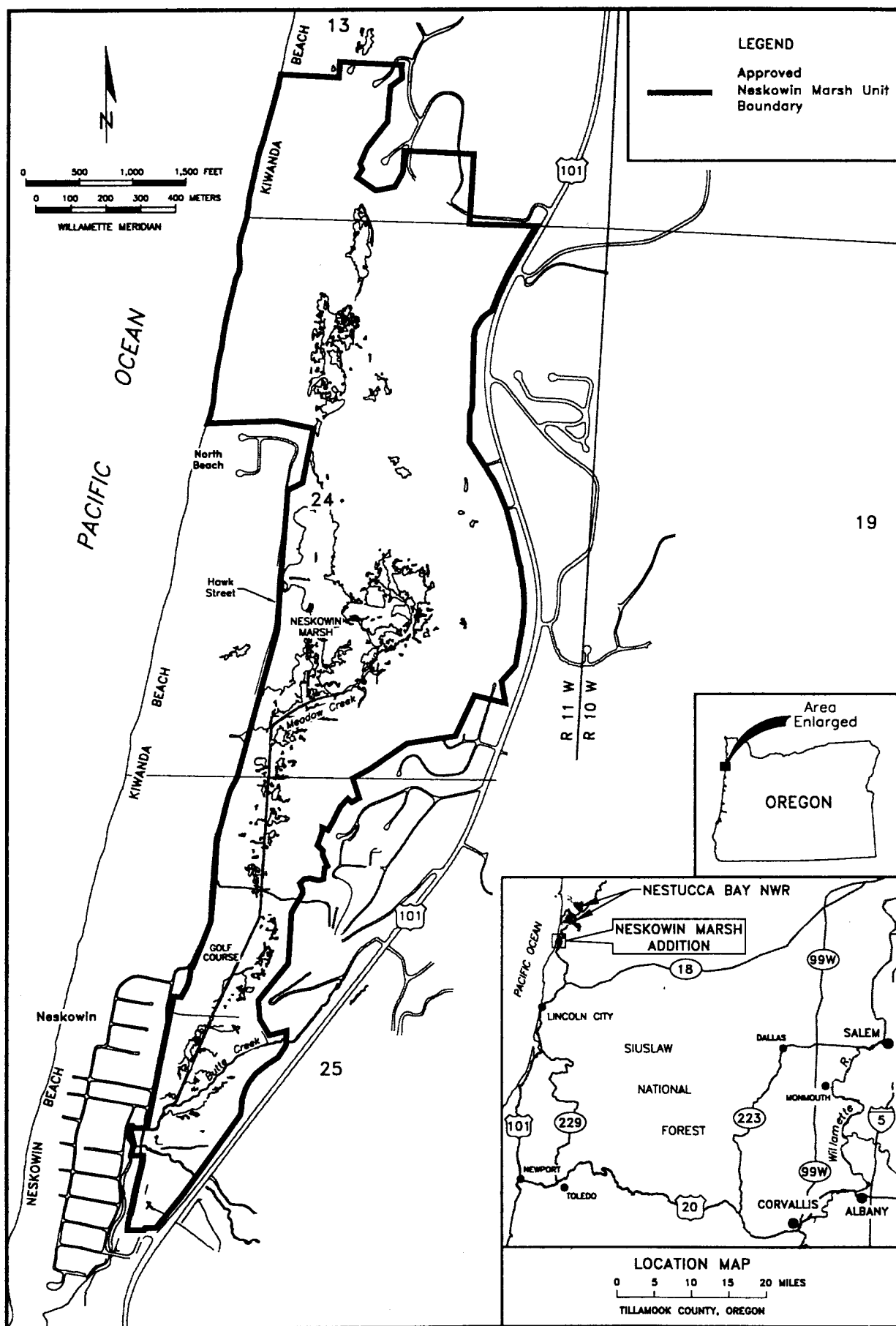
For Information on the Proposed Neskowin Marsh Addition and Refuge Management contact:

Roy Lowe, Project Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex
2127 SE OSU Drive
Newport, Oregon 97365-5258
Phone: (541) 867-4550 Fax: (541) 867-4551
Email: Roy_Lowe@fws.gov

For Information on the Refuge Planning Process contact:

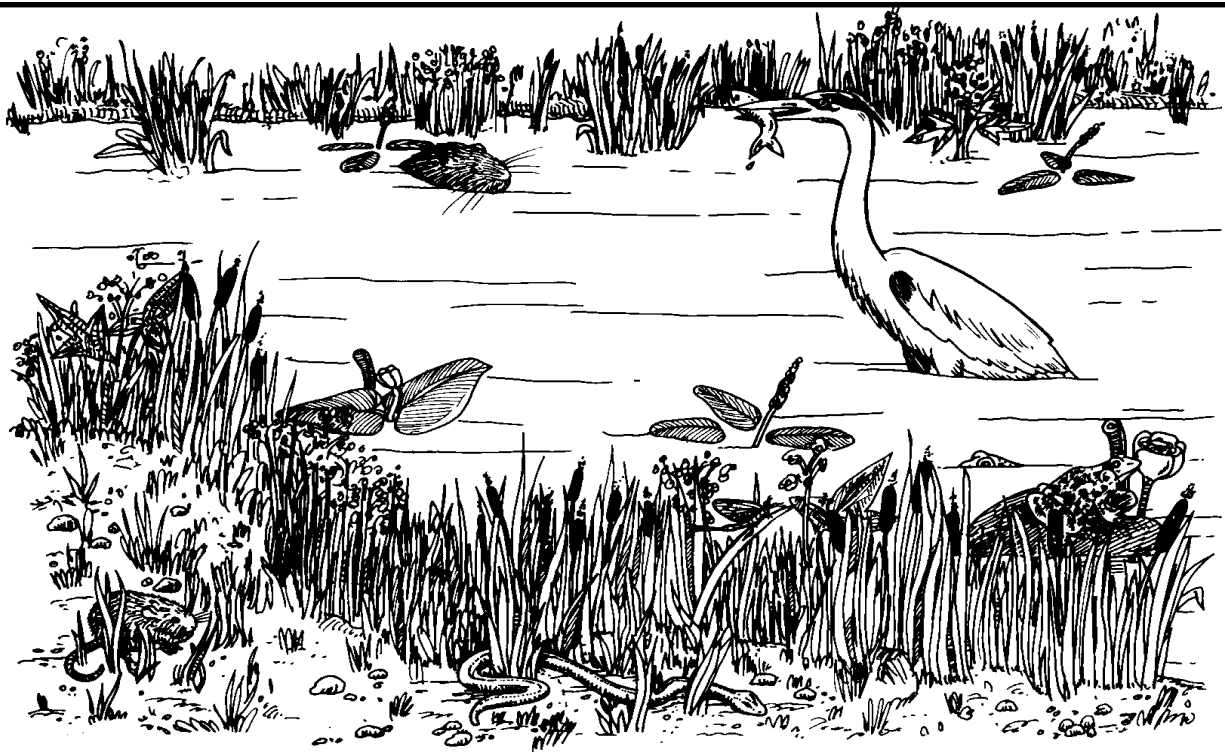
Michele Holman, Natural Resource Specialist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232
Phone: (503) 231-6839 Fax: (503) 231-6161
Email: r1planning_guest@fws.gov
(Please type "Neskowin Marsh" in the subject line)

Check out the planning home page www.r1.fws.gov/planning. Many of our planning documents, as well as a glossary and some useful links are provided.



NESKOWIN MARSH UNIT ADDITION
 NESTUCCA BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

JUNE 2000



It's a Fact! Neskowin Marsh supports a diversity of bird, mammal, and amphibian species.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish & Wildlife Service

Attn: ARW/RPL

911 NE 11th Avenue

Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

Address correction requested